

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2018 (16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 22(23); Ephesians 2:13-18; Mark 6:30-34.

**Jesus took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.**

Leadership can take many forms. In today's readings we are offered the image of the shepherd as a model of leadership. Jesus himself showed how this model of leadership works.

In the gospel, after the experience in witnessing to the good news, the Twelve return to Jesus excited and tired. Jesus shares their excitement, and recognises their need to rest. The people have tasted what Jesus and his disciples have to offer; perhaps they have not yet understood the message, but are drawn to the fact that Jesus and his disciples are offering healing. So they gather around Jesus asking for more attention.

The good shepherd needs to look after the Twelve too. They need time for themselves to talk about their experiences, eat, rest and refresh themselves. So Jesus takes his close associates away from the crowds.

Unfortunately things do not go to plan and when Jesus and the disciples arrive at their 'lonely place' they find that a crowd has already gathered there to meet them. Jesus feels pity for them and once again starts to teach them. The good shepherd cares for both the physical and the spiritual needs of those around him. He recognises that while his disciples need to be refreshed, the crowds are still hungry, and he sits down to feed them spiritual food.

In our community some are called to the role of shepherds; in the home, in our schools, in society, among our friends. In some cases this role is more explicit than in others; the parent, the teacher and the politician offer leadership by teaching, guiding and making decisions, in other situations one is invited to lead by the way one speaks and behaves.

At times we have the tendency to put our leaders and shepherds on pedestals, putting expectations upon them, isolating them from the rest of us. This is not a healthy attitude. Jesus recognises that the disciples, who have been sharing in his role as shepherd, still need to stop and be refreshed and enjoy being lead by the shepherd. While those in the role of shepherds have a duty to lead, look after and teach the sheep in their care, they need to remind themselves that they are themselves in need of being fed and nourished.

(Within Church circles the attitude of putting shepherds on a pedestal is often referred to as clericalism. Out of respect, the community often puts expectations upon its leaders and at times the leaders take on those expectations and distance themselves from the rest of the community. Today's gospel is a gentle reminder that we are all in need to be shepherded, we all belong to the same community of Christ!)

While shepherds have an important role to play in the different circles of our society, both sheep and shepherds need to remember that they all belong to the one flock; they all equally need to find time to rest and replenish themselves and be fed. When we are called to take on our role of shepherd, we need to remind ourselves that the one true shepherd is Jesus himself and it is to him that we all need to return to be fed. While respect is important, we all need to remember that our leaders are still members of our community.

Fr Mario